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Research Memorandum
RMR-12, April 4, 1962

TO : The Secretary

FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman *R. Hilsman*

SUBJECT: The Meaning of Fidel Castro's Attack on "Doctrinaire Sectarians"

The rising power of the veteran Cuban Communists appears to have provoked Castro into reducing them - at least temporarily - to their earlier role of junior partner in his Revolution.

The "New Communists" vs. the "Old Communists". Castro's March 26 television interview attacking top Communist leader Anibal Escalante for "sectarianism" brought into the open frictions between veteran Cuban Communists and the fidelistas "neo-Communists." With sarcasm and obvious personal spite, Castro accused Escalante of 1) plotting to gain control over Cuba through his post as organization secretary of the government political machine, the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI), and through the ORI to control the machinery of government; 2) failure to mobilize the "Marxist-Leninist" masses of Cuba in the ORI; and 3) undermining the prestige of the Castro Revolution.

Castro's attack confirms his awakening to the divergence of interests between himself and the local old-line Communists. To Castro, the ORI (and the forthcoming united party) is simply another mass organization. The function of the party, as Castro described it, is "to orient, to orient at all levels, not to govern at all levels,...to educate the masses in the ideas of socialism and the ideas of communism,...but it does not have the power to place and replace administrators." However, the PSP leaders, whose task it became to organize the new party, have envisioned another - strictly "orthodox" - role for the party: complete domination of state policy.

Castro now appears well aware that the creation of such a party would shift power from the fidelistas (who predominantly controlled the state machinery and the mass organizations) to the veteran PSP members (who had gained almost exclusive control of the ORI), as well as altering the Revolution's method of operation.

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Warmer Communist Support. Castro's attack on Escalante and sectarianism was foreshadowed in the previous few weeks. The CRI National Directorate named March 9 had an unexpectedly high number of non-PSP members. Raul Castro was named Second Secretary of the CRI on March 23 and Vice Premier on March 25. On March 14, Fidel Castro denounced the deletion of a reference to God in the testament of an anti-Batista student leader as "myopic, sectarian, stupid, distorted."

The PSP itself had already engaged in self-criticism in a similar vein. On March 15, Blas Roca wrote that sectarianism "is an evil which we must throw out of our ranks.... Sectarianism goes hand in hand with the mechanistic theory, a misunderstanding as to what true guidance is." Similarly the Communist newspaper Hoy on March 24 stated editorially that the CRI "needs to purge itself of all remnants of sectarianism and mechanism. This is what, step by step, the National Directorate of the CRI has begun to do under the dynamic and combative leadership of Comrade Fidel."

Castro indicated in his speech that the purge of Escalante and the attack on sectarianism had the endorsement of other top Communist leaders. He repeatedly stressed his own Marxist-Leninist loyalties, warned the "old Revolutionaries" against "mountain sectarianism" (i.e., the cliquishness of those who fought in the Sierra Maestra), and proclaimed his admiration for "good Communists" as distinguished from the power-mad, sectarian Escalante. The other top Communist leaders' enthusiastic endorsements of anti-sectarianism lends color to Castro's denial that he means to attack Communists as such, and to his assertion that fidelista and veteran Communist leaders are fully united in the National Directorate of the CRI.

Impact on Veteran Communists. The question for the future is whether, with the Escalante purge, the national leaders have agreed in relegating the veteran Communists to a supporting role, and, if not, whether the "old Communist" and the "new Communist" leaders can refrain from a mutually destructive competition. Castro has made it clear that he is prepared to fight should the veteran Communists attempt to undermine his power, and they for their part have shown obvious concern lest a power struggle destroy the Revolution. To a certain extent, their hands have been tied by the absorption of their old organization (the PSP) into the CRI. However, precisely because of the international Communist stake in Cuba, it is doubtless hard for PSP leaders to disentangle efforts to achieve an effective political-economic organization from a drive to extend their own control. Their very desire to put the Revolution across - on their own terms - will probably continue to interfere with their responsiveness to Castro.

State-RD, Wash., D. C.